<u>IN THE CLAIMS</u>

1.   (Currently Amended) A method of determining a value of an attribute of an object comprising:

        attempting to determine the value by

        formulating a first query to retrieve the attribute from a properties data

        store based upon a combination of a current context identifier, an object identifier
                associated with the object, and an attribute identifier associated with the
                attribute,

        submitting the first query through an application programming interface (API)
                associated with the properties data store <u>without having knowledge of an</u>
                <u>underlying interface to the properties data store</u>, and

        receiving results associated with the first query; and

        if the first query is unsuccessful at locating the value, then determining the value

                by

                formulating a second query to retrieve the attribute from the properties data
                        store based upon a combination of the object identifier and the attribute
                        identifier <u>without specifying the current context identifier</u>,

                submitting the second query through the API, and

                receiving results associated with the second query<u>, wherein the value is</u>
                        <u>determined based on the object identifier and the attribute identifier by</u>
                        <u>ignoring the context identifier.</u>

2.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the properties data store comprises one or more Java properties files.

3.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the first query is compliant with standard Java properties files, and wherein the first query includes a string value representing the current context identifier, the object identifier, the attribute identifier, and delimiters separating the identifiers from each other.

4.   (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein the second query is compliant with standard Java properties files, and wherein the second query includes a string value representing the object identifier, the attribute identifier, and a delimiter to separate the object identifier and the attribute identifier.

5.   (Original) A method of determining a value of an attribute of an object stored in a Java properties files, the method comprising:

        attempting to determine the value by initiating a first attribute retrieval stage that formulates and applies a first set of queries that traverse an object hierarchy associated with the object within a fixed context to a properties data store, each query of the first set of queries including a current context identifier, an object identifier associated with an object of the object hierarchy, and an attribute identifier associated with the attribute; and

        if the first attribute retrieval stage is unsuccessful, attempting to determine the value by initiating a second attribute retrieval stage that formulates and applies a second set of queries that traverse both the object hierarchy and a context hierarchy associated with the current context, each query of the second set of queries including a context identifier associated with a context of the context hierarchy, an object identifier associated with an object of the object hierarchy, and the attribute identifier; and

        if the second attribute retrieval stage is unsuccessful, attempting to determine the value by initiating a third attribute retrieval stage that formulates and applies a third set of queries that traverses the object hierarchy without regard for context, each query of the third set of queries including an object identifier associated with an object of the object hierarchy and the attribute identifier.

6.   (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein the object inherits the attribute from a base object defined in the Java properties files.

7.   (Original) The method of claim 6, wherein the object overrides the value assigned to the attribute in connection with the base object.

8.   (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein the object represents a prompt of a graphical user interface.

9.   (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein the current context inherits the attribute from a base context.

10.   (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein the current context overrides the value assigned to the attribute in connection with the base context.

11.   (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein the current context represents a particular page of a website.

12.   (Currently Amended) A system for maintaining attribute-value pairs comprising:

a Java properties file having stored therein values of a plurality of attributes associated with one or more objects, the one or more objects represented in an improved properties file syntax that is compliant with standard Java properties files semantics thereby making the existence of the one or more objects transparent to Java;

a Java application programming interface (API) to receive and apply queries for attribute values to the Java properties files; and

a syntax enhancement layer residing above the Java API that is able to receive and

parse queries formulated according to the improved properties file syntax and

issue appropriate queries to the Java API, the syntax enhancement layer

encapsulating the Java API such that an originator of the queries does not have

to know about the Java API.

13.   (Currently Amended) The system of claim 12, wherein the syntax enhancement layer
determines a value of an attribute of an object stored in the Java properties file by employing
at least a first attribute retrieval stage, a second attribute retrieval stage, and a third attribute
retrieval stage,

wherein the first attribute retrieval stage formulates and applies a first set of queries

that traverse an object hierarchy associated with the object within a fixed

context to the Java properties file via the Java API, each query of the first set of

queries including a current context identifier, an object identifier associated

with an object of the object hierarchy, and an attribute identifier associated

with the attribute,

wherein the second attribute retrieval stage is responsive to unsuccessful completion of

the first attribute retrieval stage and formulates and applies a second set of

queries that traverse both the object hierarchy and a context hierarchy

associated with the current context, each query of the second set of queries

including a context identifier associated with a context of the context

hierarchy, an object identifier associated with an object of the object hierarchy,

and the attribute identifier; and

wherein the third attribute retrieval stage is responsive to unsuccessful completion of

the second attribute retrieval stage and formulates and applies a third set of

queries that traverses the object hierarchy without regard for context, each

query of the third set of queries including an object identifier associated with

an object of the object hierarchy and the attribute identifier.

14.   (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sequences of instructions, the sequences of instructions which, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to:

attempt to determine a value of an attribute of an object by

formulating a first query to retrieve the attribute from a properties data store based upon a combination of a current context identifier, an object identifier associated with the object, and an attribute identifier associated with the attribute,

submitting the first query through an application programming interface (API) associated with the properties data store without having knowledge of an underlying interface to the properties data store, and

receiving results associated with the first query; and

if the first query is unsuccessful at locating the value, then attempt to determine the value by

formulating a second query to retrieve the attribute from the properties data store based upon a combination of the object identifier and the attribute identifier without specifying the current context identifier,

submitting the second query through the API, and

receiving results associated with the second query, wherein the value is determined based on the object identifier and the attribute identifier by ignoring the context identifier.

15.   (Original) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sequences of instructions, the sequences of instructions which, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to:

attempt to determine a value of an attribute of an object stored in a Java properties file by initiating a first attribute retrieval stage that formulates and applies a first set of queries that traverse an object hierarchy associated with the object within a fixed context to a properties

data store, each query of the first set of queries including a current context identifier, an object identifier associated with an object of the object hierarchy, and an attribute identifier associated with the attribute;

attempt to determine the value by initiating a second attribute retrieval stage in response to unsuccessful completion of the first attribute retrieval stage that formulates and applies a second set of queries that traverse both the object hierarchy and a context hierarchy associated with the current context, each query of the second set of queries including a context identifier associated with a context of the context hierarchy, an object identifier associated with an object of the object hierarchy, and the attribute identifier; and

attempt to determine the value by initiating a third attribute retrieval stage in response to unsuccessful completion of the second attribute retrieval stage that formulates and applies a third set of queries that traverses the object hierarchy without regard for context, each query of the third set of queries including an object identifier associated with an object of the object hierarchy and the attribute identifier.